SŪRAH 41

Fuṣṣilat

(Clearly Expounded)

Prologue

The question of faith and its essential principles is the major theme of this *sūrah*: God's oneness, the life to come, the revealed message as well as advocacy of the message and the manners an advocate of the Divine message should adopt. All that the *sūrah* includes serves to explain these fundamental principles and provide evidence supporting them. The *sūrah* presents some of God's signs that are available in man and in the expanse of the universe, warns against denying such signs, and reminds people of the fates suffered by earlier generations that denied the truth and shows what happens to such unbelievers on the Day of Resurrection. It explains that only such unbelievers among men and *jinn* refuse to acknowledge these truths or to submit themselves to God. By contrast, the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon and the angels submit themselves and humbly prostrate themselves before God.

Concerning the truth of God's oneness, we read at the beginning of the *sūrah* verses such as: "*Say: I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One and only God. Therefore, take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to those who associate partners with Him.*" (Verse 6) "*Say: Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two Days? And do you*

claim others to be His equals? It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds." (Verse 9) Speaking of the people of 'Ād and Thamūd, the *sūrah* tells us that the messengers sent to them explained the same truth to them: "*Worship none but God.*" (Verse 14) In the middle of the *sūrah* we have the commandment: "*Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; but prostrate yourselves before God.*" (Verse 37) Speaking about the same basic truth, the *sūrah* says towards its end: "*on the Day when He shall call out to them, 'Where now are those alleged partners of Mine?' They will say, 'We confess to You that none of us can vouch for them.'*" (Verse 47)

On the question of the life to come the *sūrah* issues a stern warning to those who do not believe in it: "*Woe to those who associate partners with Him, and who do not pay the obligatory charity, and who refuse to believe in the life to come.*" (Verses 6–7) It concludes with this verse: "*They are certainly in doubt as to whether they will meet their Lord. Most certainly, He encompasses everything.*" (Verse 54) The truth of the Day of Judgement is also mentioned in the images the *sūrah* portrays of what happens on that day, which confirms, with even greater certainty, the fact of its undoubted coming.

As for the question of revelation, there is much about it in this *sūrah*, almost to the point of revelation being its main theme. In fact, the *sūrah* opens with a detailed discussion of this issue: "Ḥā. Mīm. *A revelation from the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful: a book, the verses of which have been clearly spelled out as a discourse in Arabic for people of knowledge. It gives good news as well as a warning. Yet, most of them turn away, so that they do not hear. They say: 'Our hearts are veiled from whatever you call us to, and in our ears is deafness, and there is a barrier between us and you. So do you what you will, and so shall we.' Say: 'I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that...*" (Verses 1–6) The middle part of the *sūrah* mentions how the idolaters received the Qur'ān: "*The unbelievers say: Do not listen to this Qur'ān, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.*" (Verse 26) Then we are given a more detailed account of how the Qur'ān was received and a response to what the unbelievers used to assert about it: "*Those who reject this reminder [i.e. the Qur'ān] when it comes to them ... It is indeed a*

sublime book; no falsehood can ever touch it openly or in a stealthy manner. It is bestowed from on high by One who is wise, worthy of praise. Nothing is being said to you that was not said to the messengers sent before your time. Your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness, but He also inflicts painful punishment. Had We willed to make this revelation a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue, they would have said: 'If only its verses were clearly spelled out! Why [a message in] a non-Arabic tongue and an Arab [messenger]?' Say: 'This is guidance and healing for all those who believe; but as for the unbelievers: there is deafness in their ears, and they are blind to it.' They are, as it were, being called to from too far away." (Verses 41–44)

In its discussion of the method of advocating the Divine message and the manners adopted by such advocates, the *sūrah* says: "*Who speaks better than he who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those who have surrendered themselves to God'? Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better, and he who is your enemy will become as close to you as a true friend. Yet none will attain this except those who are patient in adversity; none will attain it except those endowed with truly great fortune. If a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with God. He alone is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*" (Verses 33–36)

These issues are presented against a backdrop of images that have a profound effect on the listener. The *sūrah* draws these images from a universe replete with signs and from the human soul with its remarkable constitution. It also shows images of the fates suffered by earlier communities of unbelievers and intense scenes from the Day of Resurrection.

One of these scenes of the universe is a very detailed image of the original creation of the heavens and the earth: "*Say: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two Days? And do you claim others to be His equals? It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds. He it is who placed on the earth firm mountains towering above it, and bestowed His blessings on it, and measured out its varied provisions in four days, ensuring equity for all who seek [such provisions]. Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke; and said to it and to the earth: 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They both said:*

'We do come willingly.' So He decreed that they become seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each heaven its task. We adorned the sky nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All-Knowing." (Verses 9–12)

We also have images of the creation of the night and day, the sun and moon, the worship offered by the angels and the earth as it humbly worships God and how it springs into life: "*Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; but prostrate yourselves before God, who has created them, if it is Him you really worship. If the unbelievers are too arrogant, those who are with your Lord glorify Him night and day and never grow weary of that. Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send down rain water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]. He who brings it to life will surely give life to the dead. He has power over all things.*" (Verses 37–39)

The human soul is laid bare before our eyes such that we see it as it really is: "*Man never tires of asking for good [things], but if evil fortune touches him, he abandons all hope, sinking into despair. Yet whenever We let him taste some of Our grace after hardship has befallen him, he is sure to say, 'This is but my due!' and, 'I do not think that the Last Hour will ever come; but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward awaits me with Him.' We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a full account of what they did, and We shall most certainly give them a taste of severe suffering. When we bestow Our blessings on man, he tends to turn aside and stay aloof; but as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer.*" (Verses 49–51)

Regarding the fates of earlier communities, the *sūrah* presents what happened to the ʿĀd and Thamūd: "*As for the ʿĀd, they behaved arrogantly through the land, against all right, and said: 'Who is mightier than us?' Did they not realize that God, who created them, was mightier than them? They continued to reject Our revelations. Therefore, We let loose upon them a howling gale raging through several days of misfortune, so as to give them, in the life of this world, a foretaste of humiliating suffering. Yet the suffering in the life to come will be even more humiliating, and they will have none to help them. As for the Thamūd, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance.*

Therefore, the thunderbolt of humiliating suffering struck them in consequence of what they had wrought. And We saved those who believed and were God-fearing." (Verses 15–18)

Several scenes are presented from the Day of Resurrection. One intensely effective and detailed image shows the unbelievers speaking to their own senses: "*On the day when God's enemies will be gathered together before the fire, they will be driven onwards until, when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they used to do [on earth]. They will ask their skins: 'Why did you bear witness against us?' To which they will reply: 'God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak. It is He who created you in the first instance, and to Him you now return.*" (Verses 19–21) Another image shows, in full clarity, the anger felt by those who were deceived in this life against those who deluded them: "*The unbelievers say: 'Our Lord! Show us those* jinn *and men who have led us astray. We shall trample them under our feet so that they shall be among the lowest of the low.*" (Verse 29)

This great variety of imagery, forming the background against which the main issues of faith are presented, constitutes the overall ambience of the *sūrah*. Right from the very outset until the end we find ourselves before the most striking and powerful of influences.

The *sūrah* may be divided into two parts, each consisting of closely interlinked sections. The first part begins with verses speaking about the Qur'ān, its nature and revelation, as well as the unbelievers' attitude to it. This is followed by an account of the creation of the heavens and the earth and the stories of the 'Ād and Thamūd. Then, comes a scene of the unbelievers on the Day of Judgement and how they face the testimony of their own senses. It then speaks about those unbelievers in this present life and how they have gone so astray. It states that they had cronies who made evil things seem fair to them. As a result they used to urge one another not to listen to the Qur'ān, but instead to try to silence it so that they might win. This is followed by an image depicting how angry they feel on the Day of Judgement with those cronies who deluded them. A contrasting image shows us those who believed in God's oneness and followed the straight path. These receive angels who reassure them and give them news of their great prospects.

The angels tell them that they will be their friends and guardians in both this present life and in the life to come. This part concludes with a reference to the message and those who advocate it.

The second part begins by speaking about the signs God placed in the universe: the night, day, sun, moon, angels in devotion, the desolate earth and how it quickens and becomes full of life. This is followed by a reference to those who dispute God's signs and His revelations, leading to a reference to God's book and its main qualities before a brief reference is made to Moses' book and the disputes that arose among his people concerning it. The *sūrah* leaves judgement concerning all these disputes to God, at the time appointed by Him. At this point the *sūrah* adds a reference to the Last Hour and that knowledge of it belongs to God alone. He also knows the fruit that will eventually develop from flowers and what offspring will be born to pregnant females. It also shows an image of the unbelievers and how they ask about those deities whom they alleged to be God's partners. Following this the *sūrah* presents the human soul as it is, shedding all its coverings. Although man is keen to protect himself he takes no precautions to spare himself the results of denying God and His messages.

The *sūrah* concludes with a promise by God that He will make His signs within man and in the universe available to people so that they have a chance to review their attitude and be assured of their faith: "*We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is witness to everything? They are certainly in doubt as to whether they will meet their Lord. Most certainly, He encompasses everything.*" (Verses 53–54)

I

Testimony of One's Own Senses

Fuṣṣilat (Clearly Expounded)

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Ḥā. Mīm. (1)

حٰمٓ ﴿١﴾

A revelation from the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful: (2)

تَنزِيلٌ مِّنَ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

a book, the verses of which have been clearly spelled out as a discourse in Arabic for people of knowledge. (3)

كِتَٰبٌ فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

It gives good news as well as a warning. Yet, most of them turn away, so that they do not hear. (4)

بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا فَأَعْرَضَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٤﴾

They say: 'Our hearts are veiled from whatever you call us to, and in our ears is deafness, and there is a barrier between us and you. So do you what you will, and so shall we.' (5)

وَقَالُوا۟ قُلُوبُنَا فِىٓ أَكِنَّةٍ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَآ إِلَيْهِ وَفِىٓ ءَاذَانِنَا وَقْرٌ وَمِنۢ بَيْنِنَا وَبَيْنِكَ حِجَابٌ فَٱعْمَلْ إِنَّنَا عَٰمِلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

Say: 'I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One and only God. Therefore, take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness.' Woe to those who associate partners with Him, (6)

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَآ
إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَٰحِدٌ فَٱسْتَقِيمُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ
وَٱسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ۗ وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦﴾

and who do not pay the obligatory charity, and who refuse to believe in the life to come. (7)

ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُم
بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ هُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٧﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds shall have an unfailing reward. (8)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٨﴾

Say: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two days? And do you claim others to be His equals? It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds. (9)

قُلْ أَئِنَّكُمْ لَتَكْفُرُونَ بِٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ
ٱلْأَرْضَ فِى يَوْمَيْنِ وَتَجْعَلُونَ لَهُۥٓ
أَندَادًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩﴾

He it is who placed on the earth firm mountains towering above it, and bestowed His blessings on it, and measured out its varied provisions in four days, ensuring equity for all who seek [such provisions]. (10)

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَٰسِىَ مِن فَوْقِهَا وَبَٰرَكَ فِيهَا
وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَآ أَقْوَٰتَهَا فِىٓ أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ سَوَآءً
لِّلسَّآئِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَهِىَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا
وَلِلْأَرْضِ ٱئْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَآ أَتَيْنَا
طَآئِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾

Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke; and said to it and to the earth: 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They both said: 'We do come willingly.' (11)

فَقَضَىٰهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَٰوَاتٍ فِى يَوْمَيْنِ
وَأَوْحَىٰ فِى كُلِّ سَمَآءٍ أَمْرَهَا وَزَيَّنَّا
ٱلسَّمَآءَ ٱلدُّنْيَا بِمَصَٰبِيحَ وَحِفْظًا
ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْعَلِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾

So He decreed that they become seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each heaven its task. We adorned the sky nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. (12)

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا۟ فَقُلْ أَنذَرْتُكُمْ صَٰعِقَةً مِّثْلَ
صَٰعِقَةِ عَادٍ وَثَمُودَ ﴿١٣﴾

If they turn away, say: 'I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the 'Ād and Thamūd.' (13)

إِذْ جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلرُّسُلُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ
وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ
قَالُوا۟ لَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنزَلَ مَلَٰٓئِكَةً فَإِنَّا
بِمَآ أُرْسِلْتُم بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

There came to them, from all directions, messengers saying: 'Worship none but God.' They answered: 'If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels. We will never believe in your message.' (14)

فَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ وَقَالُوا۟ مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً
أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَهُمْ هُوَ
أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَكَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا
يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

As for the 'Ād, they behaved arrogantly through the land, against all right, and said: 'Who is mightier than us?' Did they not realize that God, who created them, was mightier than them? They continued to reject Our revelations. (15)

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي أَيَّامٍ
نَّحِسَاتٍ لِّنُذِيقَهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ
وَهُمْ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Therefore, We let loose upon them a howling gale raging through several days of misfortune, so as to give them, in the life of this world, a foretaste of humiliating suffering. Yet the suffering in the life to come will be even more humiliating, and they will have none to help them. (16)

وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمَىٰ
عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَأَخَذَتْهُمْ صَاعِقَةُ الْعَذَابِ
الْهُونِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

As for the Thamūd, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance. Therefore, the thunderbolt of humiliating suffering struck them in consequence of what they had wrought. (17)

وَنَجَّيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

And We saved those who believed and were God-fearing. (18)

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُ أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّارِ
فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

On the day when God's enemies will be gathered together before the fire, they will be driven onwards (19)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَاءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ
سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُم
بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

until, when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they used to do [on earth]. (20)

وَقَالُوا لِجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدتُّمْ
عَلَيْنَا ۖ قَالُوا أَنطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنطَقَ
كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

They will ask their skins: 'Why did you bear witness against us?' To which they will reply: 'God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak. It is He who created you in the first instance, and to Him you now return. (21)

وَمَا كُنتُمْ تَسْتَتِرُونَ أَن يَشْهَدَ عَلَيْكُمْ
سَمْعُكُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَٰرُكُمْ وَلَا جُلُودُكُمْ
وَلَٰكِن ظَنَنتُمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَعْلَمُ كَثِيرًا
مِّمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

'You did not try to hide yourselves so that your ears, eyes and skins could not be made to testify against you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing. (22)

وَذَٰلِكُمْ ظَنُّكُمُ الَّذِي ظَنَنتُم بِرَبِّكُمْ
أَرْدَىٰكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم مِّنَ الْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

'And it is this thought of yours which you entertained about your Lord that brought you to perdition, so that you are now among the lost.' (23)

فَإِن يَصْبِرُوا فَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَّهُمْ ۖ وَإِن
يَسْتَعْتِبُوا فَمَا هُم مِّنَ الْمُعْتَبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

If they resign themselves to patience, the fire will be their home; and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so. (24)

وَقَيَّضْنَا لَهُمْ قُرَنَاءَ فَزَيَّنُوا لَهُم
مَّا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَحَقَّ
عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ
مِن قَبْلِهِم مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ
كَانُوا خَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

We have assigned to the unbelievers companions who made their past and present seem goodly to them, but the sentence has fallen due upon them together with bygone generations of *jinn* and humans. They will indeed be lost. (25)

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَا تَسْمَعُوا۟ لِهَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانِ
وَٱلْغَوْا۟ فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَغْلِبُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

The unbelievers say: 'Do not listen to this Qur'ān, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.' (26)

فَلَنُذِيقَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ عَذَابًا
شَدِيدًا وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَسْوَأَ ٱلَّذِى
كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a taste of severe suffering; and We shall most certainly requite them according to the worst of their deeds. (27)

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ أَعْدَآءِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلنَّارُ ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا دَارُ
ٱلْخُلْدِ ۖ جَزَآءًۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Such is the requital of the enemies of God: the fire will be their lasting home: a fit requital for their having knowingly rejected Our revelations. (28)

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ رَبَّنَآ أَرِنَا
ٱلَّذَيْنِ أَضَلَّانَا مِنَ ٱلْجِنِّ وَٱلْإِنسِ
نَجْعَلْهُمَا تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِنَا لِيَكُونَا
مِنَ ٱلْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

The unbelievers say: 'Our Lord! Show us those *jinn* and men who have led us astray. We shall trample them under our feet so that they shall be among the lowest of the low.' (29)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ
ٱسْتَقَٰمُوا۟ تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ
ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا۟
وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ وَأَبْشِرُوا۟ بِٱلْجَنَّةِ
ٱلَّتِى كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who say: 'Our Lord is God,' and then steadfastly pursue the right way, the angels will descend on them, saying: 'Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise which you have been promised. (30)

نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَآؤُكُمْ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَفِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا
مَا تَشْتَهِىٓ أَنفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ
فِيهَا مَا تَدَّعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

'We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for, (31)

نُزُلًا مِّنْ غَفُورٍ رَّحِيمٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, ever-merciful.' (32)

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّن دَعَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ
وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِى مِنَ
ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Who speaks better than he who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those who have surrendered themselves to God'? (33)

وَلَا تَسْتَوِى ٱلْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا ٱلسَّيِّئَةُ ۚ
ٱدْفَعْ بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا ٱلَّذِى
بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُۥ عَدَٰوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُۥ وَلِىٌّ
حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better, and he who is your enemy will become as close to you as a true friend. (34)

وَمَا يُلَقَّىٰهَآ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا۟ وَمَا يُلَقَّىٰهَآ
إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

Yet none will attain this except those who are patient in adversity; none will attain it except those endowed with truly great fortune. (35)

وَإِمَّا يَنزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ نَزْغٌ
فَٱسْتَعِذْ بِٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ
ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٦﴾

If a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with God. He alone is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (36)

The Source of Divine Revelations

The *sūrah* opens with the two separate letters, *Ḥā. Mīm*. We have explained elsewhere the reason why many *sūrahs* start with separate letters of the Arabic alphabet. That this is often stated fits in with the Qur'ānic method of repeating references to the facts it wants our hearts to internalize. By nature, the human heart needs such repetition because it tends to forget with the passage of time. In order to instil a fact in one's conscience one needs to have it repeated in a variety of ways. The Qur'ān addresses the human heart with all the qualities instilled in its nature in accordance with its Creator's knowledge.

It is as if the two letters with which the *sūrah* starts, *Ḥā, Mīm*, are a name given to the *sūrah* or to the Qur'ān. The two letters constitute the subject of the first sentence while the predicate forms the next verse: "Ḥā, Mīm. *A revelation from the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.*" (Verses 1–2) Choosing to identify the Divine attributes of grace and mercy in connection with the revelation of the Qur'ān highlights the quality that is most characteristic of this revelation, namely Divine mercy. There is no doubt that the revelation of the Qur'ān is an act of mercy for all mankind. It is a mercy for those who believe in it and implement it as also for other creatures, not merely humans. The Qur'ān defines a code of living that brings good results for all. It has had a profound impact on the life of humanity, its concepts, values and course of action. Its impact is universal and consistent, ever since it was revealed. Those who study human history with true objectivity, following its course in its wider perspective, which includes all facets of human activity, are able to recognize this truth. Many of them have also recorded this in clear terms.

"*A book, the verses of which have been clearly spelled out as a discourse in Arabic for people of knowledge.*" (Verse 3) Spelling out the verses, clearly and distinctly, according to purpose, people's nature and mentality, generations, communities, psychologies and needs is a major characteristic of the Qur'ān. Its verses are indeed clearly expounded for people who are ready to learn and receive knowledge. In this way the Qur'ān gives good news to believers who put their faith in practice, and delivers warnings to those who reject its message and entertain

evil. It also explains why such good news and warnings have been given in a fine Arabic style to Arabic-speaking people. Most of them, however, refused its message, receiving it cooly: "*Yet, most of them turn away, so that they do not hear.*" (Verse 4)

This is indeed what they did, turning away so as not to hear or be exposed to the powerful logic of the Qur'ān. As the *sūrah* later informs us, they tried hard to persuade others not to listen to the Qur'ān. Of those that did listen their attitude was the same as those who did not: they all resisted the influence of the Qur'ān on their hearts. Thus they were like the deaf, deprived of their hearing faculty.

"*They say: Our hearts are veiled from whatever you call us to, and in our ears is deafness, and there is a barrier between us and you. So do you what you will, and so shall we.*" (Verse 5) Such was their stubbornness. They hoped that the Prophet would despair of them ever responding to him and that he would, therefore, stop calling on them to believe. They did so because of the powerful effect of what he said when they deliberately wanted not to believe. Thus, they said to the Prophet: our hearts are covered over so as not to allow your words any penetration, and the deafness in our ears prevents us from hearing you, and the barrier between you and us allows you no interaction with us. Therefore, leave us alone and do what you will. We will go our own separate way. Equally, they might carelessly have said: we will neither listen to what you say nor heed your warnings. You may do what you please. We will continue to follow our own ways, caring nothing for what you do or say.

This is just one example of what the first advocate of the message of Islam had to face. Yet, still he continued to call on people to accept his message, allowing no element of despair to creep into or disrupt his work. He never hastened the fulfilment of God's promise to him or the infliction of punishment on those who denied him. He acted instead upon instruction, declaring to people that putting the warnings into action was not up to him. He was no more than a human being receiving revelations and delivering a message. His task was to call on people to believe in God's oneness and to adhere to His message. He was also mandated to warn the idolaters. Once he had done this, matters

were left to God while he himself had no say in what was bound to happen: "*Say: I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One and only God. Therefore, take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to those who associate partners with Him.*" (Verse 6)

What perseverance! What endurance and what dedication! Only a person who has experienced at first hand something of this condition can appreciate the power and resilience required to persevere against such odds. Yet this perseverance is coupled with the realization that one has no say in what turn developments take. Yet the Prophet faced such unrelenting opposition, arrogance and carelessness, without ever requesting a miracle to silence his opponents.

In order to be able to face such situations, God's prophets and messengers were often directed to remain patient in adversity. Advocacy of the Divine message can only take the road of long patience and perseverance. The first thing that requires such patience is the advocate's keen desire to see the Divine message triumph, but then realize that such triumph is slow coming. Indeed, no sign of it may appear for a long time, yet those who undertake such advocacy must accept this willingly and without hesitation.

The maximum the Prophet could do in the face of such arrogant rejection and ridicule of his message was to say: "*Woe to those who associate partners with Him, and who do not pay the obligatory charity, and who refuse to believe in the life to come.*" (Verses 6–7) The fact that *zakāt*, or the obligatory charity, is specified here must have been in response to a certain situation, which we cannot now determine. This verse was revealed in Makkah, while *zakāt* was only imposed as a duty in the second year after the Prophet's migration to Madīnah. The overall requirement of *zakāt* was known about during the Makkan period, but only as a general requirement whereby people paid as they wished. Later, in Madīnah, this was modified to make it a specific duty with defined rates on different types of property. To disbelieve in the life to come is the essence of rejection of the Divine message, and it should be met with stern warnings. Some scholars argue that in this particular instance, *zakāt* means purity of faith. The general tone of the *sūrah* and the circumstances prevailing at the time admit this possibility.

Creation of the Earth

Continuing to advocate the Divine message, the Prophet puts before them the enormity of the offence they commit by associating partners with God and rejecting His message. He points first to the universe, in relation to which they are tiny and flimsy creatures. He shows them God's power as reflected in the nature of this universe of which they constitute only a small part. He wants to draw them out of the narrow angle through which they look at the Divine message. From that angle, they see themselves as large, occupying important positions. Preoccupied with their own selves, positions and interests, and the fact that Muḥammad was chosen by God in preference to them, they overlook the great truth expounded in the Qur'ān and set before them by Muḥammad. This great truth relates to the universe, to all generations of humanity, and carries absolutism that transcends time, place and people:

> *Say: Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two days? And do you claim others to be His equals? It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds. He it is who placed on the earth firm mountains towering above it, and bestowed His blessings on it, and measured out its varied provisions in four days, ensuring equity for all who seek [such provisions]. Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke; and said to it and to the earth: 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They both said: 'We do come willingly.' So He decreed that they become seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each heaven its task. We adorned the sky nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.* (Verses 9–12)

When you declare disbelief, you are being nothing other than careless, gross and vulgar. You are denying the One who created the earth and placed firm structures over it, blessing it and assigning its varied provisions. He has indeed operated the systems of the universe, adorned the nearest sky with secure lights. Everything in the heavens and the earth willingly submit themselves to Him, while you, a mere single inhabitant on earth, arrogantly refuses to accept the truth. The

presentation of these facts in the *sūrah* typically shakes every heart: "*Say: Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two days? And do you claim others to be His equals? It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds. He it is who placed on the earth firm mountains towering above it, and bestowed His blessings on it, and measured out its varied provisions in four days, ensuring equity for all who seek [such provisions].*" (Verses 9–10)

The *sūrah* begins here by mentioning the fact of creating the earth in two days and comments on this first stage of creation before telling us the rest of the story. The comment says: "*It is He who is the Lord of all the worlds,*" and yet you claim others to be His equals when it is He who created the earth you live on. How absurd and ghastly!

Then, what are these days: the two in which God created the earth and the two in which He placed the mountains above it, measured its provisions and showered His blessings? These are days of God, the length of which is known to Him alone. They are not the earthly days we know, because earth days are a time-measuring unit that came into existence after the creation of the earth. Just like the earth has its day, which is the length of time it takes to complete one full rotation of the sun, other planets have their days, some of which are longer and some shorter than an earth day. This means that those four days of the earth's creation and its provisions are measured by some other unit unknown to us. The closest we can surmise given our limited knowledge, is that they refer to the different stages the earth went through, divided into several eras, until its crust solidified and it settled into its present shape able to support the type of life we know. According to scientific theory, such stages took around two billion earth years.

These are only scientific estimates based on geological studies and soil and rock analyses. When we study the Qur'ān, we do not take such estimates as proven facts, for they are not. They are simply postulations open to amendment and change. Therefore, we do not interpret the Qur'ān on their basis. We conclude that they may be true if they are in agreement with the Qur'ānic text and serve to explain it without coercion. We say that a theory or a set of assumptions is closer to the truth because it is closer to the meaning of the Qur'ānic text.

Scientists now say that most probably the earth was originally a gas-like mass of flame just like the sun, and most probably it was once part of the sun before splitting away from it for some reason. It took long periods until its crust cooled down and solidified. Its centre remains in melting form because of the intense heat that melts even the hardest of rocks. In the early period when the crust solidified, it was composed of many layers of rock strata. Then at some other early stage, the oceans came into existence with water forming by the combination of two molecules of hydrogen with one molecule of oxygen.

> The air and the water on this planet of ours worked together to break the rocky surface, carry it and deposit it in different places so as to make a soil that allows plants to grow. The two of them thus managed to carve out portions of hills and mountains, and to fill valleys. Wherever you turn your eyes on earth, you will see the effects of a continuous process of construction and destruction.[1]
>
> The earth's crust is in a process of constant change. The sea shakes its waves to bring its effect on the land. Sea water evaporates by the heat of the sun and it goes up into the sky where it forms clouds which produce rain of fresh water, falling down in torrents to form rivers. As the rivers run, they affect the surface of the earth, carrying some of its rocks, changing them and depositing them elsewhere. Over centuries counted in hundreds and thousands, the surface of the earth changes completely. Snow that has solidified into ice brings another effect on the surface of the earth. Likewise, its surface is affected by the wind as also by the sun, with the heat and the light it sends to the earth. The creatures living on earth cause further changes, as do the volcanoes that bring lava to the surface.
>
> Should you ask a geologist about the rocks forming the earth's crust, he will give you a long list, but he will highlight three major

1. Zakī, Aḥmad, *Ma'a Allāh fi al-Samā'* [With God in Heaven]. Dār al-Hilāl, Cairo, (n.d.) I could not locate this quotation in the book. – Editor's note.

types. He will tell you first about the igneous rocks which came out from the lower reaches of the earth to its surface in melted form, and then cooled down and solidified. He may cite as examples granite and basalt. He may show you a sample, indicating its crystalline composition, with white, red and black crystals, saying that each one of these contains a different chemical compound. Thus, he points out that these rocks are in fact a solid mix. The geologist may further draw your attention to the fact that it was out of such igneous rocks that the surface of the earth was originally made in the early stages of its formation. Then different factors came into play: water falling from the sky or running in rivers or lying in the form of ice, air, wind and sun. They all worked hard changing the nature and the chemistry of the earth's surface, bringing into existence totally different rocks that have no similarity to the original ones.

The geologist will then speak to you about depository rocks, which make the second and largest type of rock. These are the ones which have been carved by natural factors or by man out of rocks that are firmer and more solid. They are called depository because they are no longer in their original places. They have been lifted and carried by water or wind and then settled somewhere else on earth. The geologist will cite limestone as an example of such depository rocks. Limestone forms mountains, such as al-Muqaṭṭam which provides the building material for all buildings in Cairo. He will tell you that limestone is made of a chemical compound known as calcium carbonates, produced by biological or chemical factors. Sand, clay and argillaceous earth are other examples of depository rocks and they are all formed from different origins.

When you enquire about these origins you are told that all depository rocks come from igneous ones. When the crust of the earth formed in the distant past, there was nothing on its solidified surface except igneous rocks. Then rain and sea water interacted with it. The air then came into play in the form of chemical gases, winds and gales, heat and light from the sun and all these elements began to interact according to their different natures. They thus

changed the useless, hard igneous rock into rocks that can be used to build houses and rocks from which minerals can be extracted. More importantly, it changed the hard solid rock to make depository soil that can support life.

Granite does not make the sort of earth surface fit for plants or irrigation. Such surface is provided by soil which ultimately came out of granite and similar rocks. When such soil was in place, plants grew allowing animals to exist. Then the earth became a fit abode for the head of all these creatures on earth, man.[2]

This journey long as it may be thought of by modern scientists, can help us to understand the meaning of the days in which the earth was created, firm mountains placed on it, then its blessing and the measuring of its different provisions in four days. We do not know the length of these four days, but we know that they are undoubtedly different from earth days.

A Blessed Planet

We need to dwell for a moment on every phrase of this Qur'ānic text before we turn our attention to the mention of the heavens in the next verse.

"*He it is who placed on the earth firm mountains towering above it.*" (Verse 10) Mountains are often described in the Qur'ān as 'firm', and in some instances the purpose of their positioning is that they 'prevent' the earth from shaking or swaying. This means that the mountains are firm in themselves and stabilize the earth, ensuring that it remains well balanced. In times gone by, people used to think that the earth was based on firm foundations. They are told today that the earth is nothing more than a small ball that floats in a great expanse, without support. They may be scared when they listen to such words for the first time, and some of them may begin to look warily askance, worried that the earth might shake or fall in deep space. Let such people be reassured. God's hand holds the heavens and the earth, preventing their

2. Ibid., pp. 96–98.

disappearance. Should they vanish, no one else would hold them in place. Such people should banish worrying thoughts, because the laws that govern the universe are set in operation by the Almighty who holds sway over all things.

The same scientist says:

> Every event that takes place on earth, whether on its surface or below it, causing one substance to be transferred from one place to another, has a bearing on the speed of the earth as it moves in its orbit. This is not affected only by the cycle of the tide. Even when rivers carry water from one place of the earth to another, this affects the speed of its movement. The blowing wind and whatever falls into the sea or protrudes on the surface has an effect on the earth's speed as it moves in orbit. Another thing that affects such speed is any expansion or retraction of its size, even though it increases or decreases by no more than a few feet.[3]

With the earth being so sensitive, it is no wonder that firm mountains are positioned over it to ensure its stability and that it does not 'sway with you', as expressed in verse 15 of *Sūrah* 16.

And He "*bestowed His blessings on it, and measured out its varied provisions.*" (Verse 10) When our predecessors read this statement, they used to think of the vegetation that grows on earth and the useful minerals God has placed in it, such as gold, silver, iron and the like. Now that we have learnt more of the great blessings God has bestowed on this planet and of the provisions He has placed in it over long periods of time, this statement gives us a much broader meaning.

We have mentioned how some elements in the air combine to produce water, while the combination of others produce the soil that supports vegetation, and another process gives us rain, the source of all fresh water in rivers, wells and springs. All this reflects the blessing God bestowed on the earth and its measured provisions.

Then, there is also the air we breathe:

3. Ibid., p. 82.

> The earth is a circle covered with a rocky crust, and the greater part of this crust is covered by a layer of water, while above both the crust and water there is air, a thick gas layer similar to the sea, with different depths. All living creatures, man, animal and plant, live in this layer enjoying what it gives us.
>
> As we breathe we obtain the oxygen necessary for us, while plants grow their structure using carbon, or rather carbon dioxide. We eat plants, and also eat animals which in turn eat plants, and in doing so ensure our physical growth. The nitrogen in the air is needed to reduce its content of oxygen. If we were to inhale oxygen on its own, we would be burnt by breathing. There remains in the air the evaporated water which gives it its freshness, and the hydrogen, as well as small quantities of other gases, such as helium and neon. Most probably these were part of the original composition of the earth and remained in the air.[4]

The provisions we need for survival are wider in scope than the food we eat. Yet all our food is composed of the basic elements that are present in the earth or in the air. Sugar, for example, is a compound of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, while water is made of oxygen and hydrogen. The same applies to everything we eat, drink, wear or use as a tool. They are all made of the earth's elements.

All this refers in some way to the blessing bestowed on the earth and the measured provisions placed in it, over a period of four of God's days, the length of which is known only to Him.

A Design for the Sky

> *Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke; and said to it and to the earth: 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They both said: 'We do come willingly.' So He decreed that they become seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each*

4. Ibid., p. 100.

> *heaven its task. We adorned the sky nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.* (Verses 11–12)

What is meant here by the application of God's design is that it was His will to do so. The word, 'then', may not signify a chronological order; rather, it may mean turning to something higher. In our sense, the sky is higher. "*Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke.*" (Verse 11) Scientists believe that before the existence of stars there was what they call the nebula, a cloud of gas, or rather, smoke.

> The nebulas, bright or dark, contain gas and dust, which is nothing other than what is left after the creation of the stars. The theory says that the galaxy was first formed of gas and dust, from which all stars were formed by a process of deposition and sedimentation. Yet some of the gas and dust remained, and from the remainder, the nebulas formed. Yet in this great galaxy remains a large quantity, equal to that which went into the formation of the stars. The stars continue to pull some of it by gravity, which means that the stars are dusting the sky to remove what is left, yet these dusters are too few in relation to the amount that needs to be dusted away and the space that needs to be cleaned.[5]

This may be true because it is close to the meaning of the Qur'ānic statement: "*Then, He applied His design to the sky, which was but smoke.*" (Verse 11) It is also closer to the fact that the creation of the skies was completed over a very long period of time, taking two of God's days.

A Willing Submission

The verse then adds a statement expressing an awesome truth: "*and said to it and to the earth: Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We do come willingly.*" (Verse 11) This is a remarkable

5. Ibid., pp. 191–192.

reference to the fact of the universe being under God's control. It submits to its Creator and willingly does His bidding. This leaves only man who, in most cases, submits to God's law unwillingly. The law inevitably applies to him and he cannot take himself out of its domain. Man is no more than a little gear in the great machinery of the universe. All universal laws apply to him, whether he likes them or not. Yet he is the only creature who does not make the same submission as the earth and the sky. He always tries to deviate from an easy and smooth path, and, thus, he collides with the laws of nature, which will inevitably overpower him. He will then submit, albeit unwillingly. Exceptions to this are God's servants who, in their hearts, concepts, desires and actions, are not in conflict with the overall Divine law. These people submit willingly and find their way easy and smooth. They move in line with the movement of the universe, turning to God and living in harmony with all that exists. They are able to achieve wonders and produce miracles. They have no conflict with any force in the universe; on the contrary, they derive from its powers.

We, humans, submit to God's law unwillingly. How much better it would be for us to submit willingly, as do the earth and the skies. We would then enjoy the happiness that results from being consistent with the rest of the universe. At times, we also come up with what is absurd! The wheel of God's will turns in the way, direction and speed set for it, turning the universe with it according to well defined laws of nature. Yet we, out of all creation in the universe, try to force the wheel to run faster or slower, responding to what may motivate us of worry, selfishness, greed, fear or desire. We may move to this side or that, while the rest of creation moves along a well defined way. This inevitably means that we run into a collision here or there, endure pain or suffer a fatal crash. Thus, all our efforts and power go to waste. We should know, however, that when we truly believe, submit to God and relate to the rest of the universe, we will clearly understand our role, coordinate our movements with those of the universe, and move at the right time and speed, within the right space. Thus our movements will benefit by the power God has placed in the universe to produce truly great results. We will experience no arrogance or conceit because we know

the source of the power that enabled us to accomplish our great deeds. We will be certain that we do not achieve such results by our own efforts working in isolation. Instead, we achieve them when only we derive all that we do from the greatest power.

When we do this on our short journey spent on planet earth that submits willingly to God, we feel happy, comfortable and reassured. Indeed, the whole planet joins us on its own journey to its Lord. Moreover, we will enjoy the great peace that pours into our spirits as we live in a friendly universe submitting to its Lord. We will join the universe in willing submission to Him and, as a result, we will have no conflict with the universe, because we are part of it and we move with it in the same direction.

"*They both said: We do come willingly. So He decreed that they become seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each heaven its task.*" (Verses 11–12) These two days may be the same as those in which the stars were formed from the nebulas, or during which the creation was completed as God only knows how. The assignment of tasks to each heaven refers to the operation of the natural laws in them, in accordance with God's directives. What, then, does the term 'heaven' mean? We have no definite answer. The word may refer to a measure of distance. On the other hand, each galaxy may be called a heaven, or several galaxies with varying distances may be called heavens. The word also admits several other possibilities.

"*We adorned the sky nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure.*" (Verse 12) Again the sky nearest to the earth can have several meanings. It could be the nearest galaxy to us, known as the Milky Way, which has a diameter of about 150,000 light years. It could mean something else that comprises stars and planets that shine for us like lights. These skies are 'made secure' from devilment, as can be understood from other references in the Qur'ān. Quite what this entails is beyond our grasp and hence our knowledge is limited to what the Qur'ān tells us.

"*Such is the design of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.*" (Verse 12) Can anyone other than Him design all this? Can anyone other than the Almighty who knows all control the whole universe and conduct its affairs?

What Punishment for Turning Away?

Given this is the state of the entire universe, what position should be assigned to those who reject God's oneness and attribute partners to Him? How should their reckless arrogance be requited?

> *If they turn away, say: 'I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the 'Ād and Thamūd.' There came to them, from all directions, messengers saying: 'Worship none but God.' They answered: 'If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels. We will never believe in your message.' As for the 'Ād, they behaved arrogantly through the land, against all right, and said: 'Who is mightier than us?' Did they not realize that God, who created them, was mightier than them? They continued to reject Our revelations. Therefore, We let loose upon them a howling gale raging through several days of misfortune, so as to give them, in the life of this world, a foretaste of humiliating suffering. Yet the suffering in the life to come will be even more humiliating, and they will have none to help them. As for the Thamūd, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance. Therefore, the thunderbolt of humiliating suffering struck them in consequence of what they had wrought. And We saved those who believed and were God-fearing.* (Verses 13–18)

A warning against the type of thunderbolts that struck the peoples of 'Ād and Thamūd strikes fear in their hearts. It suits the terrible offence they commit. It answers the idolaters' arrogance referred to at the beginning of the *sūrah* showing them to be the only ones in the universe who reject the truth.

What sort of effect did this warning have on the unbelievers in Makkah? Ibn Isḥāq, an early biographer of the Prophet, gives us the following story:

> One day, as 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah, one of the Quraysh chiefs, was sitting with a group of Quraysh notables, he noticed the Prophet sitting alone close to the Ka'bah. 'Utbah suggested to his friends: "Shall we go to Muḥammad and make him some offers? He may

> have been spared the trouble. If he wins, whatever glory he achieves will be yours." They retorted: "He has certainly bewitched you." He said: "I have stated my opinion, and you can do as you wish."

Another report by Jābir suggests that when the Prophet recited these verses, 'Utbah listened. When the Prophet read verse 13 which says: "*If they turn away, say: I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the 'Ād and Thamūd,*" 'Utbah put his hand on the Prophet's mouth and appealed to him by the ties of kinship to his people to do nothing of the sort. Then 'Utbah left him, went home and stayed in doors. His people talked to him later about this and he explained his position: "When Muḥammad spoke this warning, I appealed to him not to do so. You know that when Muḥammad says something, he does not lie. I feared that such punishment be inflicted on you."

The Warning and Its Effect

This is, then, one image of the effect of the warning as stated by God's messenger to a person who did not believe in his message. Before we move on, we need to reflect a little on the image of the Prophet as he listened to 'Utbah making his petty proposals, his refined manners and his focus on the great issue in question. Although the proposals 'Utbah made sounded worthless, the Prophet listened attentively, without interrupting his interlocutor. He remained calm and friendly. When 'Utbah stopped speaking, the Prophet then graciously asked him: "Have you, Abū al-Walīd, finished what you have to say?" Then when 'Utbah confirmed that he had finished, the Prophet said: "Then listen to me." He waited until 'Utbah said, "I will do," before he read to him God's own words. Throughout he was friendly, calm, confident and reassured. This is typical of how the Prophet always captured his audience's attention, even though they might at the beginning jeer him and take a hostile stand. His was always a most admirable attitude. It is certainly as God says: "*God knows best whom to entrust with His message.*" (6: 124)

What does this warning signify: "*If they turn away, say: I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the 'Ād and Thamūd.*"

(Verse 13) Essentially, it begins a fresh round showing us images of the fates met by earlier communities who rejected God's message. The reckless arrogance of the present unbelievers is thus made all the more apparent through this reminder of what happened to similarly reckless and arrogant peoples: "*There came to them, from all directions, messengers saying: Worship none but God.*" (Verse 14) This is the single issue as presented by all God's messengers; it states the central point in every Divine religion.

"*They answered: 'If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels. We will never believe in your message.*" (Verse 14) Similarly, this represents the same point of doubt faced by every messenger. Yet a messenger addressing human beings could not be other than human. This so that he would know the people he addressed and they would know him. In essence, a messenger should provide a practical example and share his people's problems. Yet the 'Ād and Thamūd declared themselves unbelievers simply because the messengers sent to them were human like themselves. They were not angels as they wanted them to be.

Up to this point, the *sūrah* speaks of the fates of both peoples as if they are one: both were struck by thunderbolts. Now, the *sūrah* gives us some specific details about both peoples: "*As for the 'Ād, they behaved arrogantly through the land, against all right, and said: Who is mightier than us?*" (Verse 15) The right attitude is that all creatures should submit to God and that people should not behave arrogantly. Who, then, are the 'Ād in comparison to God's great creation? All arrogant behaviour, by whatever creature, is against all right. Yet these people thought themselves powerful. They asked: "*Who is mightier than us?*" This is the false sense exhibited by all tyrants when they feel that they have silenced all opposition and that none can stand against their power. They forget the truth: "*Did they not realize that God, who created them, was mightier than them?*" This is a basic truth: the One who originated them is more powerful than they. He was the One who enabled them to exercise their power in the first place, albeit in the limited measure He allowed them. Yet tyrants always overlook facts: "*They continued to reject Our revelations.*" (Verse 15)

We see them here boasting of their power, thinking themselves mighty. The image portrayed in the next verse shows us the fate their despicable arrogance deserved: "*Therefore, We let loose upon them a howling gale raging through several days of misfortune, so as to give them, in the life of this world, a foretaste of humiliating suffering.*" (Verse 16) It was a freezing gale lasting several days that brought them great misfortune. What was more was their humiliation in this life: a fitting response to their arrogance towards God's servants. Yet all this was a first instalment, a punishment in the life of this world. They will not escape further punishment in the life to come: "*Yet the suffering in the life to come will be even more humiliating, and they will have none to help them.*" (Verse 16)

"*As for the Thamūd, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance.*" (Verse 17) This appears to be a reference to their initial acceptance of God's message after they had seen the miracle of the she-camel which drank as much as all their other camels and cattle. However, they reverted to disbelief shortly after this, preferring to remain blind, straying from the path of truth. This is the worst type of blindness. "*Therefore, the thunderbolt of humiliating suffering struck them in consequence of what they had wrought.*" (Verse 17) Humiliation is the most fitting outcome for such an attitude. It is not merely a punishment of destruction; it adds the suffering of humiliation.

"*And We saved those who believed and were God-fearing.*" (Verse 18) The round is thus concluded. They should realize by now that nothing can withstand God's power. No one can give or seek protection against Him.

Unusual Witnesses

They have been told of God's power over the universe and mankind. Now the *sūrah* tells them of His power over their own selves. They have no authority over themselves, and no part of them is beyond the reach of His power. Even their ears, eyes and skins obey Him. They too disobey them so as to be witnesses against them on the Day of Judgement.

> *On the day when God's enemies will be gathered together before the fire, they will be driven onwards until, when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they used to do [on earth]. They will ask their skins: 'Why did you bear witness against us?' To which they will reply: 'God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak. It is He who created you in the first instance, and to Him you now return. You did not try to hide yourselves so that your ears, eyes and skins could not be made to testify against you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing. And it is this thought of yours which you entertained about your Lord that brought you to perdition, so that you are now among the lost.' If they resign themselves to patience, the fire will be their home; and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so.* (Verses 19–24)

There is a great surprise in this very difficult situation in which they see their own senses and faculties obeying God and doing as they are bid. In this situation they are branded as 'enemies of God'! What fate will God's enemies suffer? They are herded together, from all generations, like a flock of sheep, and driven to the fire. When they stand close to it and the reckoning begins, they find themselves facing witnesses whom they did not reckon with. Their tongues, long used to lie, fabricate falsehood and engage in ridicule are now tied, while their ears, eyes and skins rebel against them obeying their Lord. They report on what they used to consider secret. They used to hide themselves, thinking that God would not see them conceal their intentions and crimes. But they did not try to hide themselves from their own ears, eyes or skins. How could they, when these faculties are part of them? Now, these publicize what the unbelievers thought to be concealed from all creatures and from God Almighty as well.

As God so commands their own organs, they are overwhelmed and respond in complete obedience: "*They will ask their skins: Why did you bear witness against us?*" (Verse 21) They will put the facts clearly before them, attempting to hide nothing: "*To which they will reply: God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak.*" (Verse 21) It is He who made tongues the organs of speech. He can easily give speech to

other organs. He gave speech to all things, making them speak and explain things as they are. "*It is He who created you in the first instance, and to Him you now return.*" (Verse 21) From Him all originate, and to Him all shall return. There is no escape from His authority, neither at the beginning, nor at the end. Their minds used to deny this; now their skins state it to them in an undeniable way.

The remainder of the comments may be a continuation of what their own organs say to them, or equally it may be a comment on this amazing situation: "*You did not try to hide yourselves so that your ears, eyes and skins could not be made to testify against you.*" (Verse 22) It never occurred to you that these, your organs, could rebel against you. In fact, you could not have hidden yourselves from your organs even if you had tried. "*Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing.*" (Verse 22) Your foolish and ignorant thoughts deceived you, leading you to hell: "*And it is this thought of yours which you entertained about your Lord that brought you to perdition, so that you are now among the lost.*" (Verse 23)

We then have the final comment: "*If they resign themselves to patience, the fire will be their home.*" (Verse 24) What an absurd situation. Patience now entails enduring the fire. It is no longer the patience that withstands adversity in order to achieve a cherished goal and earn reward from God. It is a sort of patience that incurs the penalty of hell where they abide: "*And if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so.*" (Verse 24)

There is no way back, no remonstration or acknowledgement of error will suffice. It is customary for admissions of error to be coupled with a request for forgiveness, after removing the causes of strained relations. Now, no admission of error is allowed, let alone forgiveness and improved relations.

Control Over Human Souls

The *sūrah* also shows them how God's power extends over their hearts and minds, even when they are still on earth refusing to believe in Him. Since He is fully aware that their hearts have become corrupt, He lets some evil entities, from among both humans and *jinn*, befriend

them and make what is evil seem fair and goodly. Thus, they lead them astray until they join those who ruin themselves and become liable to punishment:

> *We have assigned to the unbelievers companions who made their past and present seem goodly to them, but the sentence has fallen due upon them together with bygone generations of* jinn *and humans. They will indeed be lost.* (Verse 25)

They are too proud to worship God when they are subject to His power. Their own hearts lead them to ruin and ultimately to God's punishment. God allocates them wicked companions who whisper in their ears, assuring them that all the evil they see around them is good, and who present their own bad deeds to them in a fair appearance so that they do not see how foul these are. Perhaps the worst thing that can happen to man is that he loses his balanced judgement and can no longer see how foul or deviant his actions are. In this way, he perceives everything he does as good and fair. Inevitably, though, this leads him to ruin. When the unbelievers reach this stage, they find themselves among the lost herd of past communities that suffered God's punishment: "*They will indeed be lost.*" (Verse 25)

One aspect of what such wicked companions persuaded them to do was to fight the Qur'ān when they realized how powerful was its argument: "*The unbelievers say: Do not listen to this Qur'ān, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.*" (Verse 26) The elders of the Quraysh in Makkah used to counsel each other to do just this, and they also persuaded the masses to do the same. They realized that they were no match for the Qur'ān, its beauty, power and eloquence: "*Do not listen to this Qur'ān.*" (Verse 26) They claimed that it cast a magical spell over their minds and ruined their lives, causing division between a man and his children or a man and his wife. It is true that the Qur'ān causes such division, but only through God's criterion that separates faith from unfaith, and guidance from going astray. The Qur'ān wins people's hearts so that they no longer value any other bond as they do their bond of faith. Thus, it was known as *al-Furqān*, meaning 'The Criterion'.

"*Do not listen to this Qur'ān, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.*" (Verse 26) Such frivolity is totally unbecoming, yet it was the result of their knowing that they could not combat the Qur'ān with logic or consistent argument. Those who persist in such disbelief can basically do nothing other than drown out the voice of the Qur'ān with their own frivolities. They used to do this in a variety of ways: Mālik ibn al-Naḍr, for example, used to sit and relate accounts of Rustum and other Persian kings in order to impress people so that they would not listen to the Qur'ān, while others used to shout and make noises or recited poetry and rhymes. All this, however, came to nothing while the Qur'ān retained its power because it is the word of the truth, and the truth is overpowering.

In response to their singular remark they are given a stern warning: "*We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a taste of severe suffering; and We shall most certainly requite them according to the worst of their deeds. Such is the requital of the enemies of God: the fire will be their lasting home: a fit requital for their having knowingly rejected Our revelations.*" (Verses 27–28) We soon see them suffering in hell and see how the deluded are so angry with the ones who led them astray. They realize now that it was they who led them to their fate when they persuaded them that their foul deeds were fair and goodly. "*The unbelievers say: Our Lord! Show us those* jinn *and men who have led us astray. We shall trample them under our feet so that they shall be among the lowest of the low.*" (Verse 29) They are not merely angry with them; they want to exact revenge: "*We shall trample them under our feet.*" What a contrast with their close friendly ties in this present world.

A different type of bond is that which the believers have. These are the ones who take the right path of endeavour to do only what is good. God assigns to them angels to give them reassurance, bring them the good news of their prospects in heaven and to be their guardians, both in the life of this world and the world to come:

> *As for those who say: 'Our Lord is God,' and then steadfastly pursue the right way, the angels will descend on them, saying: Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise which you have been promised. We are your guardians in the life of*

> *this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for, as a ready welcome from Him who is Much-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.* (Verses 30–32)

To remain steadfast in pursuing what is entailed by the declaration, '*Our Lord is God*,' means to keep it alive in one's conscience, to give proof to it in one's life and to discharge the responsibilities it imposes. This is serious, important and hard work. Therefore, it deserves the abundant grace God grants them: a friendly relation with angels who, as God tells us, reassure the believers with sweet words: "*Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise which you have been promised. We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come.*" (Verses 30–31) They also describe heaven to them, knowing that they will have there all that they desire and is pleasing to them. They make it even more inviting and pleasing by saying that it is "*a ready welcome from Him who is Much-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.*" (Verse 32) It is a gift from God and a place assigned to them through His forgiveness and endless mercy.

What Image for the Advocate of Islam

This part of the *sūrah* concludes by painting an image of the advocate of the Divine faith, describing his personality, discourse and fine manners. God's messenger, and indeed every advocate of God's way, are called on to adopt such ways. The *sūrah* began by describing the hostile attitude of those called upon to accept the faith and how they met this call with arrogance. Now, the advocates of Divine faith are being told what course to follow, regardless of how their advocacy is met and how their efforts are received:

> *Who speaks better than he who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those who have surrendered themselves to God'? Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better, and he who is your enemy will become as close to you as a true friend. Yet none will attain this except those who are patient in adversity; none will attain it except those endowed with truly great fortune. If*

a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with God. He alone is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Verses 33–36)

An advocate of the Divine faith must put his addressees face to face with reality. He has to confront people's deviation, ignorance, inflated appreciation of their own deeds, as also their instinctive abhorrence of being told that they are wrong. He is opposed by people's determination to serve their own interests and maintain positions that might be threatened by the principle of equality of all people, which is basic to Divine faith. To face all this as part of the task of advocating Divine faith is indeed very hard. Yet it is something truly great: "*Who speaks better than he who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those who have surrendered themselves to God'?*" (Verse 33)

Taking all this into account, a word of advocacy, calling on people to believe in God's oneness, is the best word that may be said on earth. It is at the forefront of good words that are raised to God in heaven, provided it is endorsed by good action and confirmed with self surrender to Him. Thus, such advocacy becomes pure and sincere, free of self interest. The advocate's aim is merely to discharge his duty by presenting the Divine message. Once he has discharged his duty, he should not care whether his words are rejected or whether people are rude or boastful in their denials. He is merely presenting what is good, which puts him in the higher position. Anyone who opposes him entertains evil, and, as such, is far below an advocate of God: "*Good and evil cannot be equal.*" (Verse 34) Advocates of the Divine message cannot return evil with its like. A good deed cannot be equal in its impact or value to a bad one. Patient perseverance, forbearance and rising above the desire to return evil with its like eventually brings people back to their senses. Their earlier hardness softens and they become friendly: "*Repel evil with what is better, and he who is your enemy will become as close to you as a true friend.*" (Verse 34)

This rule proves true in the overwhelming majority of cases: a stormy attitude will be replaced by calmness, fury by cordiality and arrogance by humility. All this may result from a good word, a soft tone and a smile to meet the fury of one whose anger gets the better of him. Had

such a person been met with a similarly furious approach, he would only be more quarrelsome and completely lose his self control.

Such a forbearing attitude requires a great heart, one that can forgive when it might otherwise return evil with its like. Such ability is necessary for forbearance to be effective. Otherwise, forbearance may be thought a mark of weakness. If the party resorting to evil feels that a kindly attitude results from weakness, he will not respect it. Indeed, kindness will not have any effect on the matter. Moreover, such kindness and forbearance are limited to personal insults and injuries. When the attack is levelled at believers' faith, trying to turn them away from it, then every form of resistance should be employed, or else, we remain patient in adversity until God makes His judgement in the matter.

Such forbearance, which requires us to repel an evil deed with a good one, rising above feelings of anger, is a sublime grade which cannot be attained by everyone. It does not merely require patience in the face of adversity; it is also a blessing which God bestows on His servants who try hard to achieve it: "*Yet none will attain this except those who are patient in adversity; none will attain it except those endowed with truly great fortune.*" (Verse 35) We say that it is a sublime grade; in fact it is so sublime that Muḥammad, God's messenger, who never showed anger for anything personal, yet nothing could stand to his anger when it was for God's sake, is told, as indeed every advocate of the Divine message is told: "*If a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with God. He alone is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*" (Verse 36) Anger may open the way to Satan's prompting who will then try to persuade us to be impatient and unforgiving when others resort to evil. In such a situation, we will do well to seek refuge with God against Satan. This is the best shelter against Satan's efforts to exploit our anger.

God, man's Creator, knows the keys to each and every heart, as well as its abilities and qualities. He knows where and how Satan can penetrate his machinations. Therefore, He protects the advocates of His message from stirred up anger as we face what excites the fury of even the most forbearing of us. Yet this too is a difficult road to follow, requiring that we submit here, as in every situation, to Divine directives, to the exclusion of all else.

2

No Concealment from God

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِ ٱلَّيْلُ وَٱلنَّهَارُ وَٱلشَّمْسُ
وَٱلْقَمَرُ ۚ لَا تَسْجُدُوا۟ لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ
وَٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن
كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; but prostrate yourselves before God, who has created them, if it is Him you really worship. (37)

فَإِنِ ٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ فَٱلَّذِينَ عِندَ
رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُۥ بِٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ
وَهُمْ لَا يَسْـَٔمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ ۩

If the unbelievers are too arrogant, those who are with your Lord glorify Him night and day and never grow weary of that. (38)

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦٓ أَنَّكَ تَرَى ٱلْأَرْضَ خَٰشِعَةً
فَإِذَآ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا ٱلْمَآءَ ٱهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ ۚ
إِنَّ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحْيَاهَا لَمُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ
عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send down rain water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]. He who brings it to life will surely give life to the dead. He has power over all things. (39)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِىٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا لَا يَخْفَوْنَ
عَلَيْنَآ ۗ أَفَمَن يُلْقَىٰ فِى ٱلنَّارِ خَيْرٌ أَم مَّن يَأْتِىٓ
ءَامِنًا يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۚ ٱعْمَلُوا۟ مَا شِئْتُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ
بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Those who distort the meaning of Our revelations are not hidden from Us. Who is in a better state: he who is cast into the fire, or he who shall come safe on Resurrection Day? Do what you will; He sees all that you do. (40)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِٱلذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ ۖ
وَإِنَّهُۥ لَكِتَٰبٌ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤١﴾

Those who reject this reminder [i.e. the Qur'ān] when it comes to them ... It is indeed a sublime book; (41)

لَّا يَأْتِيهِ ٱلْبَٰطِلُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ
خَلْفِهِۦ ۖ تَنزِيلٌ مِّنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

no falsehood can ever touch it openly or in a stealthy manner. It is bestowed from on high by One who is wise, worthy of praise. (42)

مَّا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ
مِن قَبْلِكَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ وَذُو
عِقَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

Nothing is being said to you other than what was said to the messengers sent before your time. Your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness, but He also inflicts painful punishment. (43)

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَٰهُ قُرْءَانًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَّقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَا
فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥٓ ۖ ءَا۬عْجَمِىٌّ وَعَرَبِىٌّ ۗ قُلْ
هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ هُدًى وَشِفَآءٌ ۖ
وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ فِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِمْ

Had We willed to make this revelation a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue, they would have said: 'If only its verses were clearly spelled out! Why [a message in] a non-Arabic tongue and an Arab [messenger]?' Say: 'This is guidance and healing for all those who believe; but as for the unbelievers: there is deafness in

their ears, and they are blind to it.' They are, as it were, being called to from too far away. (44)

وَقْرٌ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمًى ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ يُنَادَوْنَ مِن مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

We gave the Book to Moses but disputes arose about it. Had it not been for a decree that had already been issued by your Lord, all would have been decided between them. As it is, they are in grave, disquieting doubt about it. (45)

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ ۗ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

Whoever does what is right does so for his own good; and whoever does evil will himself bear its consequences. Your Lord is never unjust to His creatures. (46)

مَّنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۗ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٤٦﴾

Knowledge of the Last Hour belongs to Him alone. No fruit comes out of its calyx and no female ever conceives or gives birth, without His knowledge. And so, on the Day when He shall call out to them, 'Where now are those alleged partners of Mine?' They will say, 'We confess to You that none of us can vouch for them.' (47)

إِلَيْهِ يُرَدُّ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ ۚ وَمَا تَخْرُجُ مِن ثَمَرَاتٍ مِّنْ أَكْمَامِهَا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ ۚ وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِي قَالُوا آذَنَّاكَ مَا مِنَّا مِن شَهِيدٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

Whatever they used to invoke before will have forsaken them; and they will know that there is no escape for them. (48)

وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا يَدْعُونَ مِن قَبْلُ ۖ وَظَنُّوا مَا لَهُم مِّن مَّحِيصٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

لَّا يَسْـَٔمُ ٱلْإِنسَـٰنُ مِن دُعَآءِ ٱلْخَيْرِ وَإِن
مَّسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ فَيَـُٔوسٌ قَنُوطٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

Man never tires of asking for good [things], but if evil fortune touches him, he abandons all hope, sinking into despair. (49)

وَلَئِنْ أَذَقْنَـٰهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ
ضَرَّآءَ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَـٰذَا لِى
وَمَآ أَظُنُّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ قَآئِمَةً وَلَئِن
رُّجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّىٓ إِنَّ لِى عِندَهُۥ
لَلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ فَلَنُنَبِّئَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
بِمَا عَمِلُوا۟ وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُم مِّنْ
عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Yet whenever We let him taste some of Our grace after hardship has befallen him, he is sure to say, 'This is but my due!' and, 'I do not think that the Last Hour will ever come; but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward awaits me with Him.' We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a full account of what they did, and We shall most certainly give them a taste of severe suffering. (50)

وَإِذَآ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى ٱلْإِنسَـٰنِ أَعْرَضَ
وَنَـَٔا بِجَانِبِهِۦ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ
فَذُو دُعَآءٍ عَرِيضٍ ﴿٥١﴾

When we bestow Our blessings on man, he tends to turn aside and stay aloof; but as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer. (51)

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِن كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ
ثُمَّ كَفَرْتُم بِهِۦ مَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ هُوَ
فِى شِقَاقٍۭ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

Say: 'Have you ever thought if this be truly a revelation from God and yet you deny it? Who could be more astray than one who places himself so far in the wrong?' (52)

We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is witness to everything? (53)

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَٰتِنَا فِى ٱلْءَافَاقِ وَفِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۗ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

They are certainly in doubt as to whether they will meet their Lord. Most certainly, He encompasses everything. (54)

أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ فِى مِرْيَةٍ مِّن لِّقَآءِ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّهُۥ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ مُّحِيطٌۢ ﴿٥٤﴾

Overview

This new part of the *sūrah* addresses human hearts. It starts with a round highlighting some of God's signs in the universe, such as the night and day, sun and moon. Some of the idolaters used to prostrate themselves before the sun and the moon alongside God, when they too are no more than His creatures. They are told that if they are too proud to worship God, there are others who worship Him and are closer to Him than they. Indeed the whole earth stands in a position of worship as it receives its life from God, just as they do but who nevertheless do not use this opportunity to move closer to God. On the contrary, they deny God's universal signs as they dispute His Qur'ānic revelations, when the Qur'ān is expressed in clear Arabic, free of any non-Arabic influence. This round then presents before them a scene from the Day of Resurrection and shows them their own reality with all its weakness, changing moods and forgetfulness, eagerness to grab good things, and panicking when it is touched by harm. Nevertheless, they do not try to protect themselves from the harm that God may inflict on them. The *sūrah* ends with a promise from God that He will reveal to them His signs in the universe and within themselves

until they realize that He is the truth, removing all that remains of doubt in their hearts.

Clear Universal Signs

> *Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; but prostrate yourselves before God, who has created them, if it is Him you really worship.* (Verse 37)

These signs are there for all to see, and they have a direct effect on the human heart, even though we may not have any scientific information about them. Their relation with man is more profound than scientific knowledge because it is based on the fact that we share with them a common origin, nature and make-up. They belong to us and we belong to them: our constituting elements, nature, law and our Maker who created us all. Therefore, we warm to them and understand the message they impart to us. Therefore, the Qur'ān often directs our attention to them, without delving any deeper. It only wants us not to overlook them as a result of either long familiarity with them or other barriers. The Qur'ān removes these so as to make us alert to and interact with the messages given by this friendly universe.

The verse also points to a particular aspect of deviation. Some people exaggerated the importance of the sun and the moon, and thus deviated from the truth. They worshipped them in the hope of drawing nearer to God through worshipping the most beautiful of His creatures. The Qur'ān puts them back on track, removing their confusion and saying to them that if they want to worship God they must not prostrate themselves before the sun and the moon. Instead, they must prostrate themselves before God who created them. It is the Creator alone whom they, and all creatures, should worship.

If they persist in their arrogance, it will make no difference. Others offer worship to God in all humility: "*If the unbelievers are too arrogant, those who are with your Lord glorify Him night and day and never grow weary of that.*" (Verse 38) The first creatures we think of as being referred to by the expression, '*those who are with your Lord,*' are the angels.

However, there may be other creatures close to God and about whom we know only very little.

Those creatures who are with your Lord are more noble and honourable than humans for they do not show any arrogance like those earth dwellers who have gone astray. Nor do they allow the fact that they are close to God to go to their heads. They do not stop glorifying Him day and night. They never grow weary of this. What is the significance, then, when some people living on earth take a different stand from the rest of all creatures, and refuse to submit themselves to God?

The earth, their mother from which they originate and to which they return, stands humble before God as it receives life from His hand. On the surface of the earth they are no more like ants; and from the earth they derive all their food and drink. This earth, however, presents a different attitude from theirs: "*Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send down rain water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]. He who brings it to life will surely give life to the dead. He has power over all things.*" (Verse 39)

We need to reflect a little on the precision of the expression used here. In the Arabic original, the word *khāshi'ah*, translated here as 'lying desolate', is used. The term connotes a humble and attentive attitude, but it means here that it is motionless before rain falls on it. When rain is sent upon it, it stirs and swells. It is as if this is a movement expressing gratitude for giving it the means to support life. The context in which this verse occurs is one of attentive worship and humble glorification of God. The earth is mentioned here as one of the figures in the scene, expressing a suitable feeling and making a suitable movement.

We should refer here to one aspect of the Qur'ānic style, comparing word usage:

> The image of how the earth looks before rainfall and the appearance of shoots is used twice in the Qur'ān. In the first instance, the earth is described as *hāmidah* which means 'dry and barren', while in this instance it is described as *khāshi'ah* which means 'lying desolate'. Some people may think that this is mere

variation which writers normally use. It is far more than this. Let us look at the context in which each description is used.

The first description, *hāmidah*, occurs in the following verse: "*Mankind! If you are in doubt as to the resurrection, remember that We have created you out of dust, then out of a gamete, then out of a clinging cell mass, then out of an organized and unorganized embryo, so that We might make things clear to you. We cause to rest in the [mothers'] wombs whatever We please for an appointed term, and then We bring you forth as infants, that you may grow up and attain your prime. Some of you die young, and some live on to abject old age when all that they once knew they know no more. You can see the earth dry and barren; and [suddenly,] when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of radiant bloom.*" (22: 5)

Khāshi'ah, has a totally different context: "*Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate yourselves before the sun or the moon; but prostrate yourselves before God, who has created them, if it is Him you really worship. If the unbelievers are too arrogant, those who are with your Lord glorify Him night and day and never grow weary of that. Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send down rain water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life].*" (Verses 37–39)

A quick reflection is enough to show how each of these two adjectives fits perfectly in its context. In the first instance, the long verse speaks about creation and resurrection. It is most fitting that the earth should be shown as dry and barren before it stirs and swells, putting forth each blooming and radiant plant. In the second instance, the whole ambiance is one of worship and prostration before God. Hence the description of the earth as desolate, and then when water falls it stirs and swells. We also note that the image of sprouting different plants is not added in the second case because it does not fit in the context of worship. The stirring and swelling in the second case has a different purpose from that in the first case. Here, they merely give an image of the earth's movement after it has lain desolate. Everything in the scene described here is making the movement involved in worship.

> Hence, it does not fit that the earth should remain motionless. It stirs and swells, sharing in the movement of other worshippers. Thus, not a single detail in the scene remains fixed while all others are in motion. This sort of harmony is superior to anything we know of literary expression.[6]

The comment at the end of the verse refers to bringing the dead back to life, citing the earth as an example: "*He who brings it to life will surely give life to the dead. He has power over all things.*" (Verse 39) This image is frequently used in the Qur'ān as an example of how the dead are resurrected on the Day of Judgement. Indeed, the reviving of the earth points to the facts of resurrection and God's limitless power. The image of the earth stirring with life is close to our hearts, touching them before it addresses our minds. Moreover, when life springs in what is dead it gives a subtle feeling of the power behind it. The Qur'ān addresses human nature in its own language, using the shortest way.

How to Describe Unfaith

Against this backdrop of universal signs, the *sūrah* condemns and warns those who deny God's signs and dispute His revelations:

> *Those who distort the meaning of Our revelations are not hidden from Us. Who is in a better state: he who is cast into the fire, or he who shall come safe on Resurrection Day? Do what you will; He sees all that you do.* (Verse 40)

The warning begins in an implicit but fearful way, stating that such people "*are not hidden from Us.*" God is fully aware of them. They will have to account for what they perpetrate, no matter how they try to distort meanings or resort to deception. They may think that they can escape God's punishment in the same way as their deception spared them accountability before human authority. However, the warning is then

6. Quṭb, Sayyid, *Al-Taṣwīr al-Fanni fī al-Qur'ān*, fourth edition, Cairo, (n.d.), pp. 89–100.

stated clearly: "*Who is in a better state: he who is cast into the fire, or he who shall come safe on Resurrection Day?*" (Verse 40) This puts before them the prospect that lies ahead. It is they who will be cast in the fire, in contrast with the believers who will be safe on the Day of Resurrection. The verse concludes with another implicit warning: "*Do what you will; He sees all that you do.*" (Verse 40) Terrible indeed is the fate of the one who is given the freedom to do what he wills and who distorts the meaning of God's revelations when God sees all that he does.

The *sūrah* then speaks about those who specifically deny the Qur'ānic revelations, describing the Qur'ān as a sublime book, admitting no falsehood:

> *Those who reject this reminder [i.e. the Qur'ān] when it comes to them … It is indeed a sublime book; no falsehood can ever touch it openly or in a stealthy manner. It is bestowed from on high by One who is wise, worthy of praise. Nothing is being said to you other than what was said to the messengers sent before your time. Your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness, but He also inflicts painful punishment. Had We willed to make this revelation a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue, they would have said: 'If only its verses were clearly spelled out! Why [a message in] a non-Arabic tongue and an Arab [messenger]?' Say: 'This is guidance and healing for all those who believe; but as for the unbelievers: there is deafness in their ears, and they are blind to it.' They are, as it were, being called to from too far away.* (Verses 41–44)

The *sūrah* refers to those who reject the Qur'ān when it comes to them, but does not mention their status or what will happen to them. The sentence is left without a predicate: "*Those who reject this reminder [i.e. the Qur'ān] when it comes to them …*" It is a case of saying that such people do something so horrible that it cannot be properly described. The *sūrah* simply mentions them and moves on to describe the reminder which they reject; thus showing their action in its true and ghastly colours: "*It is indeed a sublime book; no falsehood can ever touch it openly or in a stealthy manner. It is bestowed from on high by One who is wise, worthy of praise.*" (Verses 41–42)

How could falsehood touch or creep into this book when it comes from God who is the truth absolute? It is a book which clearly presents the word of truth, one that is permanently linked to the truth that ensures the proper conduct of the affairs of the universe. How could falsehood come into it when it is a sublime book, given protection by God who undertakes to keep it intact: "*It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact.*" (15: 9)

Anyone who looks carefully at the Qur'ān will find in it the truth it has come to establish. We find this truth in its spirit and its text: it is simple, natural, reassuring, and addresses human nature in its totality with profound effect. Moreover, "*it is bestowed from on high by One who is wise, worthy of praise.*" (Verse 42) Wisdom is clearly apparent in its structure, directives, the way it was revealed, and in its direct address to the human heart. God who revealed the Qur'ān is worthy of praise. There is in the Qur'ān much that makes our hearts eager to express its praise of God.

The *sūrah* then establishes a bond between the Qur'ān and earlier revelations, and between the Prophet Muḥammad, (peace be upon him), and all messengers sent before his time. Thus, all prophets belong to one family which receives the same discourse from God. Their hearts and souls look up to Him as they pursue their course advocating His message. Thus, the last in this family, the Prophet of Islam, feels that he is a branch of a great tree with deep roots, a member of a great family that goes back to the beginnings of history.

"*Nothing is being said to you other than what was said to the messengers sent before your time. Your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness, but He also inflicts painful punishment.*" (Verse 43) It is all one message and one faith. Likewise, it is received in the same way: the same rejection and the same objections. Yet it establishes one bond, making one family which endures the same experience and feels the same pain. Ultimately, it follows the same way, leading to the same goal.

How comforting this fact is to advocates of the Divine message. It strengthens their resolve to continue along the same way that was traversed before them by God's noble messengers, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad and the others, (peace be upon them all). How honoured and confident the advocates of God's message feel

knowing that they follow in the footsteps of such a select group. Such a feeling motivates them to go along, caring little for the difficulties and hardships they meet on the way.

It is certainly true: "*Nothing is being said to you other than what was said to the messengers sent before your time.*" (Verse 43) The impact this fact can have when it becomes firmly established in the minds of believers is truly profound.

Included in what was said to God's messengers, and to Muḥammad (peace be upon him), the last among them, was: "*Your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness, but He also inflicts painful punishment.*" (Verse 43) Thus balance is emphasized. A believer then hopes for God's grace and forgiveness, never despairing that these will be bestowed on him by God's will, but always fearing to incur God's punishment. Striking the right balance is an essential characteristic of Islam.

The *sūrah* then reminds the Arabs of God's blessing by making Arabic the language of the Qur'ān. At the same time, it refers to their contentious disputes and rejection. "*Had We willed to make this revelation a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue, they would have said: 'If only its verses were clearly spelled out! Why [a message in] a non-Arabic tongue and an Arab [messenger]?'*" (Verse 44) They do not listen to it in its Arabic form. In fact, they feared it because it addressed their Arab nature in their own language. Hence, they urged each other to adopt this strategy: "*Do not listen to this Qur'ān, but drown it in frivolous talk, so that you may gain the upper hand.*" (Verse 26) Had God expressed His message in a different tongue, they would still have objected to it, calling for it to be put clearly in Arabic. They would object even if part of it were in Arabic and the other part in a different language. Their notion, therefore, was to argue in all cases and all situations.

The truth that emerges from this argument about the form given to the message is that this book provides guidance and healing to believers. Believers' hearts appreciate its nature and truth, receive its guidance and benefit from its healing. Those who do not believe remain in confusion, and their hearts do not feel the cheerfulness of its message. Hence, it becomes like deafness to their ears and blindness in their eyes. They recognize nothing, because they are far removed from the

nature of this book and its address: "*Say: This is guidance and healing for all those who believe; but as for the unbelievers: there is deafness in their ears, and they are blind to it. They are, as it were, being called to from too far away.*" (Verse 44)

We feel the truth of this statement in every community and generation. Some people are profoundly affected by the Qur'ān. It transforms them, giving them a different type of life, and enables them to achieve miracles within themselves and in their environment. Others feel this Qur'ān too heavy for their hearts and ears. When they listen to it, they only grow more deaf and blind. The Qur'ān never changes; it is hearts that are different.

A reference follows to Moses and his book, and how his people differed in their attitude to the Qur'ān. God has deferred His judgement on their disputes. He has decreed that judgement on all this will be given on the Day of Judgement: "*We gave the Book to Moses but disputes arose about it. Had it not been for a decree that had already been issued by your Lord, all would have been decided between them. As it is, they are in grave, disquieting doubt about it.*" (Verse 45) Likewise, He has decreed that judgement on the question of His final message will be similarly deferred. He thus lets people do as they like, and they will ultimately receive what their action merits: "*Whoever does what is right does so for his own good; and whoever does evil will himself bear its consequences. Your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.*" (Verse 46)

This message proclaims that mankind have attained maturity. This makes man responsible for his choices. Such responsibility is based on individual accountability. Therefore, each one is free to choose, knowing that "*your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.*"

Man's Vacillating Attitude

As judgement is deferred to the Day of Judgement, the *sūrah* makes clear that knowledge of its timing belongs to God alone. God's knowledge is described by highlighting some of its aspects in an inspiring way. This serves as a prelude to a scene from the Day of Judgement when unbelievers are questioned, and their answers are reported:

> *Knowledge of the Last Hour belongs to Him alone. No fruit comes out of its calyx and no female ever conceives or gives birth, without His knowledge. And so, on the Day when He shall call out to them, 'Where now are those alleged partners of Mine?' They will say, 'We confess to You that none of us can vouch for them.'* (Verse 47)

The timing of the Last Hour signalling the Day of Judgement is beyond anyone's ken; the fruit in its calyx is something that cannot be seen; and what a pregnant female is bearing is similarly concealed. Yet they are all within God's knowledge. Our mind looks far and wide, trying to think of the fruits when they are still in calyxes and embryos in their wombs. Who can think of their count, let alone what they actually are. An image is thus drawn of the extent of God's knowledge, to the extent our mental capacity allows. Yet His knowledge extends far beyond this, as it is without limit.

Our mind then imagines those who have gone astray, as they stand before God, realizing that His knowledge encompasses everything, no matter how well concealed it is. They face the questioning: "*On the Day when He shall call out to them, 'Where now are those alleged partners of Mine?'*" On that day, no argument is of any use. No one can utter anything but the truth. What will they say then: "*They will say, 'We confess to You that none of us can vouch for them.'*" (Verse 47) They will declare that none of them will then claim any partners to God.

"*Whatever they used to invoke before will have forsaken them; and they will know that there is no escape for them.*" (Verse 48) They will know nothing of their previous claims. They will realize that there is no escape from their fate. They will forget their past and think only of their present situation.

Such is the day about which they take no precautions despite the fact that man is eager to achieve every good thing and fears what brings him harm. At this point, the *sūrah* shows them their naked reality, without cover or disguise:

> *Man never tires of asking for good [things], but if evil fortune touches him, he abandons all hope, sinking into despair. Yet whenever We let him taste some of Our grace after hardship has*

befallen him, he is sure to say, 'This is but my due!' and, 'I do not think that the Last Hour will ever come; but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward awaits me with Him.' We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a full account of what they did, and We shall most certainly give them a taste of severe suffering. When we bestow Our blessings on man, he tends to turn aside and stay aloof; but as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer. (Verses 49–51)

Man is so insistent in his requests, urging and repeating, appealing for what he feels to be good for him. Indeed, he never tires of this. Yet should misfortune befall him, even in the slightest way, he loses hope and sinks into despair. He feels his burden too heavy, thinks that God's grace has abandoned him. All this comes about because his relationship with God is not strong enough in his heart.

Yet should God grant him something of His grace after he has suffered some harm, he will be so elated that he will forget how this grace was given to him, and he will not give due thanks. On the contrary, he will consider that he has deserved this grace and that he should have it forever. He will even dismiss the Day of Judgement thinking that it will never come: "*I do not think that the Last Hour will ever come.*" (Verse 50) He will boast of his own position, thinking that he deserves favouritism with God. He will even go further than this, denying the Day of Judgement and, thus, disbelieving in God. Nevertheless, he thinks that should he be returned to God, he will have a secure position with Him: "*Even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward awaits me with Him.*" (Verse 50) This betrays no small degree of arrogance. Here the *sūrah* issues a suitable warning to those who are so arrogant: "*We shall most certainly give the unbelievers a full account of what they did, and We shall most certainly give them a taste of severe suffering.*" (Verse 50)

Man is always moving to extremes. If God bestows His grace on him, he blows his own trumpet and behaves with arrogance. When harm or misfortune befalls him, he sinks low and collapses. He will pray insistently, prolonging his prayer. How accurate this description of man's inner thoughts is! No wonder; it is a description by God who

created man and knows the subtle workings of his mind. He knows that man will continue to follow round and circular ways, unless he is guided to the right path.

Now that they face their own naked reality, the question is put to them about what they would do if it is proven that the message they deny is actually God's own message? Are they really prepared to expose themselves to the consequences of such rejection: "*Say: 'Have you ever thought if this be truly a revelation from God and yet you deny it? Who could be more astray than one who places himself so far in the wrong?'*" (Verse 52) It is a possibility to be reckoned with. Have they taken any steps to deal with this should it come true?

Signs Galore

They are left to think and consider. The *sūrah* now turns to the open universe, revealing some of the signs placed in it, as well as some of what is within their own selves:

> *We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is witness to everything? They are certainly in doubt as to whether they will meet their Lord. Most certainly, He encompasses everything.* (Verses 53–54)

This is the final note in the *sūrah*, and it is a profound one. It is a promise by God to mankind to put before them some of the secrets in the universe and some of the secrets working within themselves. These are His signs. They will thus be able to realize that this faith, this book and its discourse are the truth. Indeed it is, for it is all from God, and whose word is truer than God's? And God's promise has certainly come true. Over the fourteen centuries that followed this promise He has made many of His signs in the universe and within man known to us, and He continues to show us more of these every day.

When we look around us we see that man has discovered much since then. Wide horizons have opened before us, as well as much of

what was unknown about man. If people would only reflect on how they came to know these and show gratitude for this, they would have ensured great benefit. They now know that the earth, which people used to imagine as the centre of the universe, is no more than a small satellite of the sun, and that the sun is merely a small circle of which the universe contains millions and millions. They also know the nature of their earth and sun, as well as the nature of the universe, if their modern information is true.

People now know much about the matter of which the universe is made, if it is true that it is made of matter. They know that the atom is the basic unit of which the universe is made, and that the atom can be transformed into radiation. They thus know that the whole universe is made of radiation that takes many different forms, making a great variety of shapes and sizes. We have also come to know much about our planet, learning that it is round in shape, like a circle or close to a circle, and that it rotates on its axis and moves in orbit around the sun. We have learnt about all its continents, oceans and rivers, and discovered what was previously unknown to us of what is below its surface. Moreover, we now know much of the provisions placed inside it and in its atmosphere.

Man has also learnt much about the laws that link his planet with the great universe and which operate within the universe as a whole conducting its affairs. Some people have gone further, moving from knowledge of these laws to knowledge of the One who created them. Others have remained stationary, looking at what has become known without moving forward. Although scientific advancement led mankind first to go astray, it has begun now to return, through scientific advancement, realizing that God is the truth absolute.

New knowledge about man is in no way less spectacular than that about the universe. We have learnt much about the human body: its characteristics, make-up, physiology, the food it needs and what it makes of it, the illnesses affecting it, how the body works and the functions of its different organs. These discoveries put before us real miracles that can only be the work of God. We have also learnt something about the human soul. Our new knowledge does not compare with what we learnt about the human body, because our study

and research have concentrated far more on the physical rather than the mental and spiritual in man's life. Yet what we have learnt so far heralds great discoveries in this field as well.[7]

Yet man has not reached the end of the road. God's promise remains true and valid: "*We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth.*" (Verse 53) Early signs of the fulfilment of the last part of this promise have come to be noticed since the early years of the twentieth century. People are flocking from different parts of the world to join the camp of faith. Many are coming forward through material science. Numerous others are coming from far away, despite the great tide of atheism that almost drowned the earth in the past. This tide of atheism is now on the retreat, although to all appearances it seems still to be rising. By the close of this twentieth century it may almost have disappeared, by God's will.[8] For, God's promise will certainly come true: "*Is it not enough that your Lord is witness to everything?*" (Verse 53) It is He who has made this promise, and it is He who knows the truth and is witness to it.

"*They are certainly in doubt as to whether they will meet their Lord.*" (Verse 54) It is because of their doubt that they will meet their Lord that people continue to perpetrate what they do. Yet the promise is true, no doubt. "*Most certainly, He encompasses everything.*" (Verse 54) How can they escape meeting Him when He encompasses all?

7. The author wrote this nearly 50 years ago, and his prediction has come true. Research in mental health has made great advancements, but scientists in this field assure us that we are still at the beginning and there are bound to be more spectacular discoveries. – Editor's note.

8. The author here was over optimistic, but it is such optimism and trust in the fulfilment of God's promise that continues to motivate advocates of the Divine faith despite the great obstacles in their way. – Editor's note.